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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR FINDS ANSWERS FOR WHITING FISHERY INDUSTRY

Researchers at the Fish and Wildlife Service's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries Technological Laboratory at Gloucester, Mass., have presented to a whiting industry meeting the results of a year's study by the Bureau on "Improving the Quality of Whiting," the Department of the Interior reported today. The study resulted from a request by industry leaders.

Representatives of 14 whiting concerns or associations, from Massachusetts and Maine, and officials from the National Fisheries Institute and the States of Maine and Massachusetts heard the Bureau's reports on its studies conducted on handling and processing whiting, both on the vessel and ashore, and on developing and marketing new whiting products to stimulate this New England industry and the use of this greatly underutilized fishery resource. The whiting industry ranks 11th in volume and 20th in value in United States fisheries.

The Bureau's investigations and laboratory work were aimed at finding ways to eliminate or minimize problems that have continued to plague the industry. Bureau technologists explained that although the physical attributes and plentiful supply of whiting make it more desirable than some other species for fried fish, it loses its initial delicious quality at a more rapid rate unless handled with greater than ordinary care.

The Bureau also pointed out to the industry the variety of acceptable fish products made of whiting, including canned whiting, which could be marketed. New whiting products made up and tested for acceptability, taste appeal, and storage life at the Bureau's laboratory included such items as croquettes, burgers, steamed and smoked sausages, smoked whiting, and a freeze-dried patty. Eight of these products were taste-tested at the industry meeting and were termed "encouraging." However, as the Bureau's report commented, "None of these products can be marketed successfully for any period of time unless the highest quality fish is used consistently."

To reach and maintain this necessary standard of high quality, the Bureau outlined actions the industry could take both aboard the vessels and in the processing plants, such as providing shelving in the vessels' storage pens because whiting is a soft fish particularly susceptible to bruising damage; reducing dock-side layovers to no more than 12 to 14 hours; and using easily-cleaned, salt-resistant aluminum for the fish-hold penboards. Bureau tests resulted in the recommendation of storing fish on the vessels and at the processing plants in tanks of sea water refrigerated to 30° F., eliminating most of the problems arising from storage in ice, and improving greatly the quality of the whiting.

The Bureau's report also included recommendations for increasing efficiency of processing plant operations, reducing labor costs, and new methods of processing. These recommendations were developed by two members of the Bureau's laboratory staff who visited 26 whiting plants during the year.

Industry representatives expressed appreciation for the Bureau's efforts. They labeled the presentation "very interesting and informative" and said the proposed new products seemed to offer considerable promise for expansion of the whiting industry.

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